

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY**

**INFORMANT: MARY HARTNETT
INTERVIEWER: ROBERTA GAUTHIER
PLACE: MILLVILLE, MA**

**R = ROBERTA
M = MARY**

SG-BV-T119

R: The Bicentennial Committee of the town of Millville will present an oral history of our town by means of a series of interviews with some of our prominent citizens. I'm Roberta Gauthier, a member of the Bicentennial Committee. It is with pleasure that I introduce Mary Hartnett, chairman of this committee, as the first person to be interviewed. She was born in Millville, the fourth in a family of five children. She is presently living on Main Street, in the home that was built by her grandfather, John Conway. She attended Longfellow School and attended graduated from Blackstone High School as the class valedictorian. She was also class president for four years. Miss Hartnett, your senior class planned a class trip to Washington DC. This was in the year 1909. It certainly must have been different to travel to Washington in those days. Would you tell us a little about that?

M: If my memory serves me well, it was on Friday, March 26, 1909, at 4:50 pm, that the thirteen members of the senior class of Blackstone High School embarked on the longest trip from home for most of us. A large delegation, all of thirty people, who were relatives and friends assembled outside the Blackstone Station to see us off and to wish us well. We were scheduled to go to New London, Connecticut, where we would take an overnight trip by boat to New York City. But word reached us that the docks were on fire there, necessitating our changing at Stonington, Connecticut, for the boat. The boat trip was most interesting, since it was first for most of us. One unforgettable incident which occurred in the evening, when our three chaperones were otherwise engaged, is worth mentioning. In those days, girls did not smoke, boys did it on the sly. However, the urge to smoke came to one of our fair ladies, who smoked an entire cigarette of sweet Capril before our very eyes, to the amazement and delight of the rest of us. She said it was her first, but we had our doubts, because she showed no ill effects. After leaving the boat early Saturday morning, we boarded a train to Philadelphia Pennsylvania. Here, we visited the United States mint, and were allowed to gaze on white canvas bags loaded with thousands of dollars we were told. I recall, that the floor covering of the large loom, where the money was coined could be removed in order to salvage every speck of gold or silver that

happened to fall to the floor. Metal worth hundred of dollars, was just saved to be used later. from there, we visited Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. Liberty Bell was also on display in this building. After lunch, a short trip was made to visit the house where Betsey Ross produced our first flag, Old Glory. In early afternoon, we again boarded the train, bound for Washington DC, our destination. It was in that same year, 1909, that the then beautiful, and new railroad station was completed, and in use, and we took pleasure in viewing it. Our hotel was named the "New Willard" staffed by negro waiters, who we decided were most gracious and kind. Our 7:00 evening dinner, with several courses, took us quite a long time to consume, so by 10:00 we were fairly exhausted and willing to retire. Right now, I would like to digress a little from our Washington itinerary, to tell my readers, just how we financed the seven day trip. First of all, in 1905, we as freshmen we agreed, we organized, electing a president, a secretary, and treasurer. The same officers were re-elected each year so that the trip to Washington might become a reality in 1909. Each years activities, in money making gave these officers added experience in dealing with the public, and making friends. In those remote times, the per capita cost of the weeks trip was \$31.00, a total of \$403.00 for a class of thirteen, four boys and nine girls. That project today, would be a very easy undertaking, but believe me, to us, it was almost an impossible dream, however, where there's a will, there's a way. And we had will plus. The money realized from our first successful bean supper, held in Masonic Hall, on Main Street, Blackstone, was put into a bank account, with Mrs. Theresa Down Hendrick as our efficient treasurer. Then followed dances, [unclear] parties, rummage sales, cake sales, candy, knitted articles, plants, aprons, suppers, and books of chances. As I recall, Kitty Quigley was our secretary, who used many a two cent stamp, sending up for all kinds of information, brochures, uh, about class trips, and the writer, yours truly was president. the cooperation, good will and hard work, of my classmates, together with the assistance of our parents, teachers, and townsmen, made our four year project a reality. No longer an impossible dream. We reached our initial goal of \$403.00 to cover travel and hotel expenses, and in addition we had earned \$ 65.00, which allowed each of us \$5.00 spending money [laughs], now I think of it. Ah, what an accomplishment! We were justly proud of ourselves. Now I take you back to Washington. The first day there, was spent visiting the US Treasury Building, The Smithsonian Institute, and The Library of Congress. How I admired that building with its' [unclear] breathtaking, colored mosaics on the walls. MOst of us made a second trip to this magnificent library. Perhaps, the Corcoran Art Gallery was next to be visited. Our eyes opened wide, the statuary on display, [laughs] you can imagine kids. And the paintings done by masters of Europe occupied our attention for some time. A most interesting trip was made to the Mural of Engraving and Printing, where we saw paper money being made. Now that we had reached our goal of \$403.00, money was no longer the attraction it had been back in 1905. I must not forget our trip to the beautiful, 555 foot Washington Monument. We ascended to the top by elevator, but descended on foot. Along the walls of the stairway, were stones dedicated to the different states of our country, 48 there were then, I believe. OUR trip later to the White House, the home of the president, was most rewarding. That beautiful East Room, with its' fabulous chandeliers, gold upholstered furniture, and drapes, was breathtaking. It is in this marvelous setting, that we heard jovial president William H. Taft say to each one of us, "How are you, Miss, SO and So?" A guard standing beside the president asked our name and he relayed it to the president. Surely, such sudden familiarity thrilled us. Our tour of the Blue Room, The Red Room and other rooms in the White House was really worthwhile because guides called our attention to many beautiful pieces of furniture and ornaments. We spent an

entire morning in the Senate Chamber, and likewise in the House of Representatives. Since we have been given our most interesting course in Civil Government in our Senior year, we truly appreciated seeing our government at work. We were allowed to shop in some of the nicer stores. But this did not appeal to many of us, since we realized we lacked the wherewithall to make any unusual purchases, except perhaps, a little souvenir for our folks back home. The trip by boat up the Potomac River, to Mt. Vernon was the highlight of my trip. We made an extensive trip to George Washington's palatial home and surroundings. A side trip to Alexandria, Virginia was interesting, because we saw one of the terrible Southern prisons with the dungeon quarters. The trip there by trolley was memorable, because we were shocked to learn that negroes were obliged to retire to the back of the car. We pitied those Negroes, and decided then and there, that such treatment was unjust to a segment of our society. We also saw Ford's Theater, where Abraham Lincoln was shot by the assassin John Wilkes Booth. And we were allowed to visit the house across the street and even the room where the president was taken and died. By now my mind is so filled with such a number of things, that I can't seem to recall much of our return journey, other than to say, uh, we had much fun. Relatives and friends were glad to welcome us home on Friday morning. Since 1909, I have revisited Washington a few times on shorter trips. In 1968, I retraced my steps to the before mentioned points of interest. And I also enjoyed the display of the Japanese Cherry trees, the magnificent church of the Immaculate Conception, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, with the changing of the Guard. These sites were not in existence in 1909. In conclusion, I firmly believe trips to our National and Historical Shrines could make an indelible impression on our youth in particular as they most certainly made on me when I but sweet sixteen. By celebrating our bicentennial through such excursions, we can establish the fact, that we were the first great self governing people in history.

R: After graduation, from high school you attended Worcester Normal School for three years and received a certificate to teach.

M: Yes, that's right. And upon graduating, my first position teaching was teaching 30 pupils in a one room school, located, on what is now the Eddie Dowling Highway. Formerly known as the Louis [unclear] pike. And when I walked that dusty, dirt road, it was simply called the old road top Providence. There were no buses at that time. So after leaving the trolley car at the old car barn, now occupied by Almax of Park Square, I had to walk much more than a mile to the school. My yearly salary was \$400.00. Being paid \$40.00 once a month, for 10 months. Toward the end of the year, I became a permanent substitute in the Woonsocket School System, subbing in almost every grade and every school building in the city. Because I did not live in the city, I had to wait for five years, until I was assigned to a regular grade. The principal of one school where I taught, liked uh, my work so much, that he insisted that the school committee, assign me to grade at Earl Street. Two years later, I decided to accept the position of Americanization teacher at the Woonsocket Rubber Company, where I had worked during two summer vacations. Of course the salary was far greater than I had been receiving. At the time, in 1919, we had many immigrants from Europe, European countries, coming to Woonsocket where they readily found employment with the Rubber company. These farmers spoke little English, but were excellent workers, so it was advantageous for the company to establish a school where they could read, write and speak English and work for naturalization papers. I was selected as their teacher. The Rubber Company was making great profit at the time, so they could well

afford this service to the new employees. However, in 1921, we had a minor recession, so this school was discontinued. So I was offered training with courses at Harvard, Tufts and MIT to prepare me to become assistant interrelations manager. A position I held from 1921-1931, the year of the Great Depression, when the entire factory closed down, in May. I secured a teaching position in the Concord Mass school system and attended Boston University after school, Saturdays and summers to earn a Bachelors degree in 1941, and a Masters Degree in 1943. I taught English in Concord High School and later set up the first Guidance program in that school. Later, I was elected assistant Guidance Director, with half my time, devoted to counseling and testing. I remained in Concord thirty years, leaving in January 1960 because of serious illness of my sister. Nine years later, I had the pleasure of becoming acting principal of Longfellow School until a regular principal was hired. I held this position for about six months. It was a most rewarding experience. My present employment is gardening and keeping house.

R: Miss Hartnett, please tell us about two members of your family, your father and your brother Joseph, both of whom I understand, were highly respected citizens of Millville.

M: Yes, it is with a mixed feeling of modesty and pride, that I hear, that I have consented to relate the accomplishments of both my father, the late Edward P. Hartnett, and my brother, the late, Joseph A. hartnett. Without doubt, my father, inherited some of his father's mechanical skills as a cabinetmaker. He always enjoyed owning and using many of the tools his father used in building their modest home in St. John's New Brunswick, my fathers birthplace on June 2, 1853. He passed away on August 15, 1934, at the age of 81.

R: What sort of career did your father follow as a young man?

M: As a young man, he learned cabinet making, serving for a definite length of time as an apprentice, to be followed by a longer period, of time as a journeyman. Until, finally, a completion, an acceptance of a masterpiece. He was rated as a master mechanic.

R: When did he become interested in architecture?

M: A few years later, while living and working in New York City, he decided to increase his knowledge of architecture by studying with a Mr. Evan Smith, a well known architect of the period. Incidentally, it was this gentleman who introduced my father to Mr. Joseph Bannigan, who later employed my father to draw the plans and write the specifications for the Millville Plant of the Woonsocket Rubber Company, which in later years, for a time was the largest rubber boot factory in the world.

R: That's interesting. Tell us something about the Red Bridge. Do you remember the Old Red Bridge that spanned the Blackstone River?

M: Yes, that bridge shorten the distance that the tenants of the Eighteen company houses in [unclear] City, had to travel to their employment. My dad designed that bridge and also the Bannigan City houses.

R: Was the Millville factory the only factory he ever designed?

M: No, it was not. A factory in Fisherville Massachusetts, and still used., was also planned by him. In later years, when my family first owned a car, a [unclear] in 1910 we toured to Worcester to what is now Route 122. In passing through Fisherville, my dad never failed to remind us of his part in the construction

R: Did not your father draw plans for some houses in town?

M: Several house, including my home on Main Street. The Powers house, Main Street was owned, now owned by Mr. Lanoue. The Hendrickson house, Main Street, built by Mr. Fred Hatfield. The Old Garrett building on Central Street now owned and occupied by William J. McCormick. the Morin House, West Street as well as the addition of two transepts in the former St. Augustine's Church. And also the hand carved extensions on either side of main altar, later destroyed by fire, can be credited to him.

R: When did your father come to Millville?

M: He came in 1880, as a bachelor, living in the OLd Mill Hotel, Central Street. This building has since been torn down. When my maternal grandfather decided to build a duplex house at ! Main Street, he wished to have my parents occupy one half of the house. Oh yes, I should have stated earlier, that my mother, Mary Conway, became the wife of Edward P. Hartnett. By mutual consent, both families moved in. To be expected, my father drew the plans for his new father-in-law. While Mr. Frank Henry, a building contractor of Oxbridge erected the two family dwelling, at the amazingly low price of 1600.00. I still have the receipted bill of that transaction.

R: Imagine that. I understand your father worked for the rubber company a long time.

M: Yes, until the Great Depression of 1930, forced the closing of the noble factory. My father was continuously employed as general maintenance supervisor for nearly 50 years. I can truthfully say, in conclusion, and in loving tribute, that besides being a good citizen and a craftsman, my father was a devoted family man. a hard worker, an excellent example for his five children and a credit to his community.

R: Miss Hartnett, you mentioned your grandfather, John Conway. I was wondering if you were related to the Conway who owns the funeral parlor in town?

M: No, I am not related. Several people have asked me the same question.

R: A few days ago, you related the major accomplishments of your late father, now, are you prepared to tell us about your late brother Joseph?

M: Yes, I am. Joseph was born in Millville on January 3, 1887, and died on June 26, 1971, at the age of 74. So much can be related of his diversified accomplishments, that I shall not attempt to mention more than a few of them.

R: Was Joseph artistic as a youngster?

M: Yes, as a child, he was always busy, drawing, making or painting things, that struck his fancy. I can recall a good size wooden horse and wagon, that he constructed of wood for our enjoyment. At the age of nine, he made his first attempt at violin making. I still have this one, the top and back were made of pine. While the ribs were fashioned of linoleum because he could bend it uh, into a shape easily. In later life, he learned to play the violin, he made 104 beautiful instruments, some of which are still being played upon, by persons in this locality. Only recently, I had the rare pleasure of listening to Mr. Ralph Anderson as he played on one of these violins at the Bicentennial Ecumenical Service in 1769, Chestnut Hill Meeting House. Sadness and happiness filled my heart on that special occasion.

R: Wasn't your brother, like your father, interested in architecture?

M: Oh yes. The talent of this self taught artist extended into the field of architecture. The Millville Town Hall, Polish Hall, Longfellow School Annex and several houses in town were designed by him.

R: What type of work did he like best to do?

M: He often said, cabinet making afforded him the greatest pleasure and satisfaction. Unlike the average craftsman, who surrounds himself with formidable looking workshop, he used part of the garage, at time. Yet he often sat in the kitchen or in a comfortable chair in the living room to do his carving.

R: Tell us something about his tools?

M: His woodworking tools had accumulated through the generations. His paternal grandfather, himself, a cabinetmaker, handed down his treasured tools, to his son, who in turn, passed along the tools to Joseph. He of course, added some modern tools, to the array of old ones.

R: Were all of his projects confined to woodworking?

M: No, indeed. The urge to paint resulted in two large wall panels. One in the stair hall and the other in the dining room. The hall panel is a reproduction of Rossa Bonner's "The Horse fair". The one in the dining room was copied from a painting depicting a scene from Shakespeare's King Lear. What appears to be wallpaper, in the space above the [unclear] in the dining room, is a mural painted in gray and white, against a cream color canvas background. Whenever a piece of furniture such as the Mahogany Dining Room table called for brass caps on the feet, he wrought the pieces of metal to fit. Pieces of furniture requiring upholstery, like the couch, were finished by his own skillful hands.

R: What you have mentioned, were just his spare time projects. Wasn't he regularly employed, besides?

M: Yes, indeed. After completing a four year liberal arts education at Holy Cross in Worcester. He spent two years in the service of Uncle Sam, WWI. Later he was a mechanical engineer for the US Rubber Company. After which he became a mechanical designer for the American Ringer Company, and later a salesman for the same concerned. Still later, while working days as a lay out designer, for the Taft Purse Company, he devoted his evenings to instructing inmates in manual arts at the Norfolk Prison Colony, in Norfolk Massachusetts. he did not neglect the outside appearance of his home either. He replaced the original long open front porch with a pediment doorway that compared favorably with a 19th century mansion. He beautified the inside with a hand carved [unclear], paneled [unclear], and [unclear] door and window trim. He seldom made any attempt to turn out an exact copy of a carbon. But the mantle in the living room is a replica of one done by that master, Bullfinch, to be found in the Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston. Incidentally, the Providence Journal of November 9, 1975 had a picture of the Bullfinch Mantle.

R: Did your brother do any preliminary work before starting these projects?

M: He certainly did. Preparation for the designing of these pieces included several trips through Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City., which displayed rare antiques. And also he did research thoroughly books filled with photographs of worthwhile items. Joseph never took notes, nor checked his size, he relied on an uncanny memory and an innate sense of proportion. While his account was quite sketchy, and fails to cover many, many other interesting items, yet the listener should get some idea of the scope and the God given talent of this remarkable man, my beloved brother.

* [Tape stops, and both informant and interviewer discuss the interview, waiting for the tape to rewind.]

END OF SIDE ONE